

American Heart
Association



Learn and Live.

EXHIBIT 7 H04
DATE 1-14-09
HB 85

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1/8/2009

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, my name is Cliff Christian and I represent the American Heart Association and the American Stroke Association. We are here today to strongly support HB 85. It's the absolute right thing to do to support Montana's approximate 2500 volunteer licensed emergency medical technicians (EMT) who service more than 48 of our 56 counties.

The mission of the American Heart and Stroke Associations is to reduce cardiovascular disease.

Today, cardiovascular disease is a leading cause of death among adults. We, estimate sudden cardiac arrest is responsible for about 250 000 out-of-hospital deaths annually in the United States. So, we have a strong interest in helping to improve any modifiable cardiovascular risk or healthcare systems targeted to reducing death and disability from cardiovascular disease.

Heart disease and stroke are the second and fourth leading causes of death here in Montana. The latest available heart and stroke statistics (2005 stats) show almost one-third of all deaths in Montana are attributable to cardiovascular disease. In fact, annually, CVD caused 2,538 deaths among Montanans, 1,842 deaths from heart disease, 521 deaths from stroke and 175 from other CVD (2005 stats). We don't know how many deaths were averted through early intervention by citizens using CPR or an available AED; and it's not possible to calculate how many more deaths would have been attributable to cardiovascular disease had it not been for the courageous actions of Montana's licensed emergency medical technicians intervening. Suffice it to say we could easily surpass 3,000 deaths annually without these interventions. But, we can do better.

62% (620,000) of our population lives in one of eight counties. The remaining 38% (380,000) live in rural and frontier Counties. Those who live in one of the eight have the services of full time, emergency medical technicians to quickly draw upon for health emergencies. The other 380,000 Montanans that live in rural areas and those travelling through, recreating, hunting or working in our rural frontier counties rely almost exclusively on a system of volunteer emergency medical technicians to help in a health crisis. According the Legislative Auditor's office there were 72,382 nine one-one (911) related EMS incidents in 2006: 43% of these calls

were in rural or Super-rural areas where the volunteer EMTs work. That means over 31,000 911 emergencies were responded to by Montana's volunteer EMTs. Just imagine the cost to the taxpayers if these calls had been answered by salaried EMT employees from the county or town where the incidents occurred? It would be enormous.

Webster's dictionary describes a hero as: "a person admired for his or her achievements and noble qualities; one who shows great courage."

- Like an emergency medical technician who revives a drowning victim.
- An EMT who prevents a person from freezing to death trapped in a winter storm.
- A licensed emergency medical technician who administers care to a child critically injured in an auto accident.

We believe all licensed EMTs meet Webster's definition of a hero. These are our neighbors, our co-workers, our friends and family members who serve. And, according to the Legislative Auditors, 53% of these licensed EMTs are volunteers in our Montana communities working with no salaries or benefits.

HB 85, if enacted, will finally provide the volunteer EMS units (*that according to the Legislative Auditor comprise 73% of all units in Montana*) with a stable funding source for the emergency replacement of equipment. Volunteer fire services in Montana have a fairly stable funding source from which they can replace vital equipment on an emergency basis. But that is not the case with our volunteer EMS. EMS units are usually able to receive local government funding for initial equipment needs - like the purchase of an ambulance; but volunteer EMS units have absolutely no consistent funding source to replace a blown engine on an ambulance or to purchase life-saving equipment, that for many reasons, may become depleted, or unusable. Sometimes they can "sweet-talk" a governmental entity and receive some assistance, but because it is an emergency many local governments simply have no monies in their budgets. Other times, if they hit the right cycle, Homeland Security and/or a FEMA subsidiary may come through with the money to buy the emergency equipment. But, at best, these funding sources are sporadic and unreliable for the purchase of emergency equipment

If our volunteer EMTs are to continue to serve this State adequately; to continue their life-saving missions, we, as a State must do better. We need to institute a series of volunteer EMT recruitment and retention plans and we must find a consistent funding source for these volunteer units to secure the life-saving equipment to do their jobs.

HB 85 requests a fund transfer from the Department of Transportation's non restricted account, to the Department of Health and Human Services for the purpose of providing emergency equipment grant money in times of crisis. This proposed fund does not provide routine money for the purchase of equipment - only matching funds to purchase equipment on an emergency basis and only after a thorough review by a Grant Committee.

It's the right thing to do.

The State Department of Transportation is charged by the Federal government when it receives its funding, to mitigate the human and economic consequences of traffic crashes. In his letter to Montanans dated 9-20-06, DOT Director Jim Lynch states, "It will take the committed and

sustained efforts of partners in every level of government, tribal governments, in the private sector, and in the 'four E's' of engineering, enforcement education and emergency response – all working together – to achieve success.” We could not agree more. HB 85 simply requests the DOT step up to the plate and participate fully in Montana's EMS system by providing just 10% of the non-restricted funds out of the approximately \$10 million in that account.

The DOT in its **Goals of the Montana Comprehensive Highway Safety Plan and the CHSP Planning Process** needs to (In their words) “Develop an effective and Integrated Emergency Medical Services (EMS) delivery system” (page two, bullet 9). And to further quote from the **Comprehensive Highway Safety Plan**:

“Emphasis Area #9. Emergency Medical Services Delivery (CHSP; page 5, sub #9)

CHSP Strategies:

- 1. Establish EMS Legislation and Regulation.**
- 2. Provide EMS funding.**
- 3. Enhance Capabilities for Medical Response to Disaster**
- 4. Expand EMS Human Resources.**
- 5. Enhance EMS Education System.**
- 6. Expand EMS Services.**
- 7. Facilitate EMS communications.**
- 8. Conduct EMS Public Education and Information Programs”**

DOT does an outstanding job of working on and improving our highway infrastructure and I'm sure no one wants to materially reduce their effectiveness. HB 85 simply begins the process, instituted by the DOT, to adopt priority measures to assist EMS in Montana. HB 85 is the right way to go.

We also believe that because the President-elect's billion dollar infrastructure plan to rebuild our highway system is eminent, there is no better time than now to establish this new system to provide a consistent funding source for 73% of Montana's EMS system. DOT will soon have a major new funding source and, hopefully, with your concurrence in the passage of House Bill 85, Montana will be able to finally provide a stable funding source that will allow our volunteer EMTs to continue their life-saving missions, fully equipped to get the job done.

Thank you.